



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

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MAR 12 2014

Ref: 8EPR-N

Mr. Joseph G. Alexander, Forest Supervisor
Shoshone National Forest
c/o Carrie Christman
808 Meadow Lane
Cody, WY 82414-4516

RE: EPA Comments on Final Environmental Impact
Statement, Shoshone National Forest Land Management
Plan Revision, CEQ #20140007

Dear Mr. Alexander:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 (EPA) has reviewed the January 2014 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Shoshone National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP) Revision. Our comments are provided for your consideration pursuant to our responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

Background

The planning area encompasses the entire 2.4 million acre Shoshone National Forest and is located in Fremont, Hot Springs, Park, Sublette and Teton Counties in northwestern Wyoming. It is bordered on the west by Yellowstone National Park and the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

The LMP revision will replace the 1986 Shoshone Land and Resource Management Plan. The Draft LMP/EIS analyzed six alternatives scenarios with varying degrees of acreage allocated to management area categories. A seventh scenario, Alternative G, was added to the Final EIS based on public comments received on the Draft EIS. The alternatives are briefly summarized below, with more detail provided for the original and revised Preferred Alternative:

- Alternative A (No Action) – continuation of present management under the existing 1986 management plan with no change to management area allocations;
- Alternative B (identified as the Preferred Alternative in the Draft EIS) – adjusts management direction from the 1986 plan to provide changes to management acreage allocations that include less acreage for over-snow motorized recreation but more for total miles of motorized trails;

more acreage for new special area designations and eligible wild and scenic river segments; more acreage for vegetation management activities including timber production; less acreage for high potential oil and gas occurrence available with surface occupancy; and no change for commercial livestock grazing;

- Alternatives C through F – provide a range of scenarios from a focus on wilderness protection to the highest level of commodity production and motorized use.
- Alternative G (identified as the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS) – a modified version of Alternative B that was developed in response to public comment received on the Draft EIS. The main differences include additional acres of winter motorized recreation outside of crucial winter range, changes to summer motorized recreation, changes to suitability for oil and gas development, and modification to special area boundaries.

The EPA's Comments and Recommendations

The EPA provided comments on the Draft EIS in a November 26, 2012 letter. Our comments noted that the Draft EIS indicated the oil and gas leasing stipulations contained in the 1995 Record of Decision for oil and gas leasing may be inconsistent with the revised LMP and may require revision to ensure protection of resources. In order to determine whether those stipulations are consistent with the revised LMP, we continue to encourage the USFS to pursue a revision to the oil and gas leasing analysis, and we will welcome the opportunity to discuss recommendations for leasing stipulations, mitigation measures and monitoring requirements to ensure protection of air and water resources from impacts associated with oil and gas development.

The EPA's November 26, 2012 comments focused on aquatic resources, air quality, and adaptive management and monitoring. These concerns were largely addressed in an August 28, 2013 response letter from the BLM to the EPA and through additional information provided in the Final EIS, Appendix A, *Content Analysis Report*. This additional information and revisions to the Final LMP and the Final EIS, Chapter 3, *Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences*, provide more thorough disclosure of potential impacts and mitigation options.

Aquatic Resources

We appreciate that the expanded Appendix E, *Maps*, now includes maps for municipal watersheds, streams, riparian areas and wetlands. We also note the addition of two new appendices - Appendix G, *Detail Information for Watersheds Functioning at Risk*, and Appendix H, *Watershed Conservation Practices Handbook Design Criteria*. These expanded and additional appendices, along with revisions to the Final EIS, Chapter 3, provide information important to understanding existing resource conditions, how the analysis was conducted, and requirements for design criteria and best management practices to protect soil and water resources.

We also support the revisions in the Final LMP to address groundwater resources, including the addition of related desired conditions and a guideline to avoid or minimize impacts on groundwater-dependent resources. Since the USFS has stated that mapping of groundwater resources is beyond the scope of this

analysis, we will look for those details to be provided in future project-level analyses. We continue to encourage the USFS to periodically confirm that the most current groundwater information is being collected and considered in the planning area, particularly where activities are being contemplated that could affect groundwater resources.

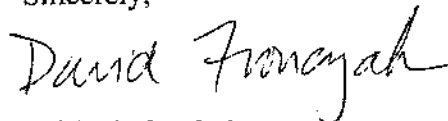
Air Quality

We appreciate that the Final EIS includes a discussion regarding the portion of the Upper Green River Basin Marginal Ozone Nonattainment Area that is within the Shoshone National Forest and the USFS's plans for addressing related general conformity issues in the future. We note the addition of an LMP guideline to consider this issue during plan implementation and believe it will guide the USFS's efforts to meet the Clean Air Act requirement to conduct a general conformity analysis for project emissions occurring in the nonattainment area. The EPA has assisted other agencies in exploring options to reach conformity and is available to discuss conformity requirements and options if that would be useful as you move forward with project-level analyses.

If the USFS begins a revision of the oil and gas leasing analysis for the Forest, initiates future field-wide or site-specific analyses, or is involved in an Environmental Assessment for any upcoming lease sales, then the EPA would like to resume discussions regarding the related emissions inventories, potential air quality impact analyses and appropriate mitigation measures. This would be consistent with the process described in the June 23, 2011 National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding air quality analyses and mitigation for federal oil and gas decisions through NEPA. It may be appropriate to utilize the MOU's stakeholder process to share emissions inventory information and to determine if additional steps are necessary for air quality analysis.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this Final EIS. If we may provide further explanation of our comments, please contact me at 303-312-6704, or your staff may contact Amy Platt at 303-312-6449 or platt.amy@epa.gov.

Sincerely,



for

Philip S. Strobel
Acting Director, NEPA Compliance and Review Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation

